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 INTRODUCTION BY CHRISTOPHER DIETRICH, FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

Energy Independence and the Revolution in Military Affairs

In a series of articles in the last decade, including a shrewd primer on the geopolitical history and current politics of oil in 2019, Anand Toprani has marked himself as a serious and insightful scholar of the history of oil and diplomacy.¹ In the award-winning *Oil and the Great Powers*, he has fashioned an engrossing story about the growth and overextension of British and German power in the first half of the twentieth century. Drawing on vast research in the fields of political economy and grand strategy, the book provides historians with a richer understanding not only of the politics of European oil supply but of the military, financial, and diplomatic history of the interwar world.

Toprani describes the ‘revolution in military affairs’ of the first half of the twentieth century, in which cheap oil became the indispensable source of energy for the war machines of modern states. It also became the factor that led both great powers to obsess over the supply and price of oil. At the same time, the book skillfully employs the concept of ‘energy independence,’ or, as policymakers and business executives at the time had it, autonomy, to explain how both nations’ supply and financial situations excluded the possibility of compromise over the strategic resource. The book focuses on both British and German actors and also gives voice to political and commercial elites within each society.

Oil and the Great Powers is masterful in its description of the geopolitical threats to autonomy that each nation faced, as well as the influence of commercial actors on diplomacy. In one example, Toprani’s research into the materials of the Oil Board of the Committee of Imperial Defense, which looked to Iran and Iraq rather than Venezuela for the lion’s share of British consumption, emphasizes Iranian nationalism as a threat to British energy security. The more important geopolitical threat by the 1930s, though, was Italian naval power in the Mediterranean. As Toprani writes, the deficiency of security around Mediterranean oil ports led to British dependence on the United States and, in turn, exhausted the British economy and ended Great Britain’s status as a first-rate world power. The British had ‘squandered’ their supply from the Middle East; they could not protect the source or their supply lines and thus became dependent on expensive, U.S.-dominated oil from the Western Hemisphere.

Germany, which had focused on synthetic fuel from coal during its rise in the 1930s, was forced to set a strategy of waging war in short bursts. Toprani reminds us that this policy that was implemented after the rise of the National Socialist party marked a continuation, not a break, from the previous emphasis on synthetics.² Indeed, synthetic fuel, along with stockpiling and technological hubris, stood at the center of German plans for self-sufficiency and military conquest. The scope of German territorial control after the conquest of Western Europe from 1939 to 1941 led to an energy deficit and

¹ The primer is at <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/a-primer-on-the-geopolitics-of-oil/>. Undergraduates in courses on the history of U.S. foreign relations, military history, or European history will benefit from reading at least one of the following: “The French Connection: A New Perspective on the End of the Red Line Agreement, 1945-1948,” *Diplomatic History* 36:2 (2012): 261-299; “Germany’s Answer to Standard Oil: The Continental Oil Company and Nazi Grand Strategy, 1940-1942,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37:6-7 (2014): 949-973; “The First War for Oil: The Caucasus, German Strategy, and the Turning Point of the War on the Eastern Front, 1942,” *Journal of Military History* 80:3 (2016): 815-854; “An Anglo-American ‘Petroleum Entente’? The First Attempt to Reach an Anglo-American Oil Agreement, 1921,” *The Historian* 79:1 (2017): 56-79. I look forward to reading Toprani’s new work on inter-service competition and military planning in the early Cold War: “‘Our Efforts Have Degenerated into a Competition for Dollars’: The ‘Revolt of the Admirals,’ NSC-68, and the Political Economy of the Cold War,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 30:4 (2019): 681-706; “Budgets and Strategy: The Enduring Legacy of the Revolt of the Admirals,” *Political Science Quarterly* 134:1 (2019): 117-146.

² Those interested in the relationship between German strategy and economics, with an emphasis on the global context, will benefit from reading my colleague at Fordham’s recent book: David Hamlin, *Germany’s Empire in the East: Germans and Romania in an Era of Globalization and Total War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

complemented Hitler's belief that Germany needed to open up an Eastern Front. Germany's turn to Romania is wonderfully told, as is the explanation of how policy transformed during and after the 1938 Sudeten crisis.

The participants in this roundtable all recognize the benefits of the comparative and interdisciplinary methodology. The approach makes sense because Germany and Great Britain shared the problem of being resource-poor but adopted different strategies because the former was a continental power and the latter was a maritime one. As Gregory Brew writes, Toprani uses his rare capacity to "speak oil" to remind historians that problems with political economy involve not only production or consumption, but also movement. This, Brew writes, allows us to understand more clearly both the challenge of nations like Italy and Romania to each protagonist's plans for strategic autonomy through energy security. Attempts to control and move oil were marked by debates over the best means to resolve "the energy independence dilemma," and Toprani's focus on different groups of elites allows him to tell a complex story. Brew accepts the argument that oil played an important role in strategic shifts in the fighting of World War II, especially when the Wehrmacht pivoted toward the Caucasus in 1942

Alfred C. Mierzejewski agrees with the benefits of the comparative approach and calls the arguments in *Oil and The Great Powers* "striking and in many respects correct." He also finds impressive Toprani's use of material at the Imperial War Museum, the National Archives in London, and the British Petroleum Archive at the University of Warwick. He also lists Toprani's extensive use of German archives, including those of the Deutsche Bank, the Federal Institute for Earth Sciences and Raw Materials, the Continental Oil Company, and the Reich Finance Ministry. Meirzejewski believes, though, that Toprani's realist approach limits his understanding of Nazi decision-making because it does not place enough value on the governing factor of Hitler's decision-making: anti-Semitism. For the reviewer, this means that Toprani's "extended examination of internal studies of Germany's oil position is unnecessary, and indeed, misleading." Such projections, he says, are famously unreliable and need to be taken into consideration with greater attention to the driving force of Nazi Germany's "irrational racist ideology." He cites new works in the field of German Studies to make his point that the quest for autonomy drove decision-making less than Toprani thinks. Despite this major difference and others, he believes the book is "thought-provoking."

Fiona Venn also describes *Oil and the Great Powers* as well-researched and written from a perspective that demonstrates "a wide knowledge of both oil politics and the wider historical context." She finds the comparative framework "inspired" because it follows the trajectory of two nations who had radically different problems and policies. She appreciates the close attention to government and business elites, as well as the influential "wheels of bureaucracy" like the Oil Board of the British Committee of Imperial Defense or the military and civilian wings of the Third Reich. But Venn also wished for more attention to the wider perspective that informed policymaking. Where Meirzejewski turns to anti-Semitism, Venn calls for a closer understanding of British power in the Middle East, the rocky state of Anglo-American relations in the 1920s and 1930s, and the rise of the National Socialists in Germany. On the last point, she agrees that the nature and extent of Germany's aggressive expansion could be developed in greater detail. But she doesn't go as far in her argument, stating that Toprani's discussion of the evolution of Germany's Four Year Plan for self-sufficiency takes into account the most important power groups. Likewise, she finds compelling his argument that Germany's aggressive policy after the spring of 1939 led to an overstretched supply chain. Germany simply could not supply its newly conquered empire without acquiring oil from the Soviet Union, the Middle East, or both. For her, the book is "an excellent addition to the literature on the history of oil."

Toprani's response to the reviews is thorough, and readers will learn a great deal about his response to Brew on the logistics of oil supply and state finances in the interwar period. One should not underestimate the role of foreign exchange difficulties as a factor in diplomacy. Toprani provides a rigorous rejoinder to Mierzejewski's critique, and ends with a defense of the benefits of comparative history in the study of geopolitics. "When studying geopolitics, we cannot afford to limit ourselves to the 'mental maps' of individual decision-makers or neglect the material and institutional dimensions of strategy," he says. "Access to critical resources will continue to shape the outcome of great power rivalries long after the Age of Oil has ended."

Toprani also discusses the wartime policy of Germany between 1942 and 1945, with an emphasis on the bureaucratic consensus that the nation could create a defensive bulwark in Europe that would impose unbearable costs for its enemies. *Oil and the Great Powers* covers a number of important topics that are of interest to European historians, military historians, and oil historians, including the failed merger effort among major oil companies from 1922 to 1924, the extension of the Anglo-Persian concession in Iran in 1933, the roles of banks in the formation of policy, the influence of Iraqi nationalism, the alliance of IG Farben and Jersey Standard, Mexico's 1938 nationalization, and the logistics of World War Two. The two great powers were trapped by the policies they created by the end of 1941, Toprani argues. Great Britain by then was a strategic vassal subordinate of the United States and Germany had blazed through its reserves in a war that lasted longer than planners expected.

Toprani writes well, has an eagle eye for the telling quote or statistic, and vigorously analyzes the major military, diplomatic, and economic issues that shaped German and British policy. *Oil and the Great Powers* is a significant and sophisticated contribution to the history of oil and diplomacy, and it helps us understand why that natural resource was and remains so indispensable in war and peace.

Participants:

Anand Toprani is an Associate Professor Strategy & Policy at the U.S. Naval War College, a Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and the author of *Oil and Great Powers: Britain and Germany, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), which received the 2020 Richard W. Leopold Prize from the Organization of American Historians. The views he expresses are his own and are not necessarily those of the U.S. Government.

Chris Dietrich is Associate Professor of History and Director of American Studies at Fordham University. His first book, *Oil Revolution*, was published with Cambridge University Press in 2017. He is the editor of the two-volume Wiley Blackwell *Companion to the History of U.S. Foreign Relations, Colonial Era to Present* (2020) and a forthcoming book on U.S. capitalism in the twentieth century world with Penn Press. He is currently at work on two projects: a history of U.S. nationalism and oil diplomacy from World War I to the present and a biography of Ralph Johnson Bunche.

Gregory Brew is a post-doctoral fellow at the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University. His work focuses on U.S.-Iranian relations and the international political economy of energy, and he has published articles in *Iranian Studies*, *International History Review*, *Passport*, *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, and *Mediterranean Quarterly*.

Alfred C. Mierzejewski teaches modern German history at the University of North Texas, Denton, Texas. He has published works on the German National Railway, Ludwig Erhard, and the German public pension system.

Fiona Venn, who is retired, taught in the Department of History at the University of Essex, UK. Her teaching centred on international history, with a focus on Anglo-American relations and the history of oil diplomacy on the one hand, and U.S. history in the period 1918-45 on the other. She has published widely on the interwar period and also on oil diplomacy, in particular *Oil Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1986) and *The Oil Crisis* (London: Longman, 2002).

REVIEW BY GREGORY BREW, SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Comparative studies pose a double challenge. Not only must the author master two distinct sets of secondary literature while excavating both disparate archival groups, crafting an argument that finds areas of comparison or contrast in a way that feels neither forced nor overly simplistic. Those who approach a historical issue from a comparative perspective must also find a common language binding both subjects together—a through-line that does justice to each subject's individuality without sacrificing the intellectual consistency of the study.

In taking the comparative approach, Anand Toprani pulls off a triple feat. *Oil & the Great Powers: Great Britain & Germany, 1914-1945* displays deep research in British and German archives as well as an intimate familiarity with most relevant, recent scholarship. Yet Toprani also displays a capacity to 'speak oil.' His analysis draws on oil's unique characteristics, adding value to a crucial work of scholarship on oil's rise as the world's most important strategic resource, while readdressing the question of 'energy independence' at a time when the concept has found fresh importance.

Toprani directly confronts the oft-claimed notion that conflict in the twentieth century centered on the acquisition or control of strategic resources, particularly petroleum. No scholar, he contends, can seriously argue that nations "fight wars over oil simply for its own sake" (1). Nevertheless, much of Toprani's study is centered on how Britain and Germany each sought oil in order to obtain strategic autonomy. His deep knowledge of the political economy of oil brings forth a number of concerns that rarely feature in such studies: the question of foreign exchange and trade balance, the complex relationship between private capital and state power, and the infrastructure necessary to turn petroleum into economic and strategic power.

A key take-away from Toprani's study is the problem, not of oil's production, but of its movement. A case in point is the British attempt to secure and develop the oil of the Middle East in the 1921-1941 period, an aspect of oil's global history which has been subjected to considerable scholarly analysis. Toprani argues that the British effort was mostly wasted. The oil in Iraq and Iran, while bountiful and cheap, was of the wrong quality. The rise of resource nationalism, exemplified by Iran's cancellation of its oil concession in 1932, threatened British access, yet prompted "no major reassessment of Britain's oil position" (96). Of greater importance was the dearth of tankers and the difficulties inherent in shipping oil through the Mediterranean Sea once Italy emerged as a belligerent power after Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. British companies may have spent millions of pounds sterling developing Middle Eastern oil, but sources in the United States and Venezuela remained the safer option. Great Britain was saddled with a dual problem: "finding a balance between transporting oil it could not afford and paying for oil it could not move" (118). Britain went to war in 1939, as in 1914, dependent upon the United States for its fuel supply.

In the case of Germany, the problem of securing access to oil was compounded by a desire for self-sufficiency, an aspect of German oil policy that Toprani traces from the Weimar Republic (1921-1933) and the development of synthetic oil by I.G. Farben to the Third Reich's autarkic ambitions. Toprani shifts his focus away from synthetics, which have dominated the study of Germany's domestic fuels industry, to explore the country's complex relationship with Romania—the only European nation outside the USSR with sizable domestic oil production. He also makes the simple, yet compelling argument that synthetics were chiefly seen as a temporary stopgap, one that would supply the Nazi war machine until oil could be secured through conquest.

It should come as no surprise to those familiar with the work of Mark Mazower and Adam Tooze that Adolf Hitler's government went to war with woefully inadequate stocks of petroleum and products, or that Nazi Germany's quick victories in 1940 left it with larger problems than it had faced in 1939: specifically, the responsibility to supply energy for all of Continental Europe. Toprani inundates the reader with statistics illustrating the depths of the Third Reich's energy dilemma, one that could only be resolved by Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941. This decision, undoubtedly the most significant of the war, was taken for several reasons, including the ideological imperative of acquiring "living space" in Eastern Europe. Toprani argues that ideology and economics "co-mingled." (239)

Before 1941, the USSR was a major source of energy for Nazi Germany; this was an untenable situation that was not entirely dissimilar to Britain's reliance on the United States. The difference was that London could reasonably depend on its ally across the Atlantic, whereas the conquest of the USSR formed a crucial component of Hitler's strategy for Germany's economic self-sufficiency. "Operation Barbarossa was irresistible," writes Toprani, "because it offered a resolution to Germany's overarching strategic dilemma after June 1940 while pandering to the ideological preconceptions of its leaders" (251).

Toprani also makes the insightful, if somewhat underdeveloped point that the strategic shift in 1942—when the Wehrmacht turned its focus away from Moscow and towards the Caucasus—is evidence of another change in the German outlook, away from the permanent conquest of the USSR and towards the short-term goal of acquiring sources of oil. "Energy independence for Axis Europe," Toprani explains, "was only conceivable in the short run if the Third Reich occupied the Caucasus" (231). When this campaign failed, Germany was placed in the impossible situation of waging a long war (which had never been Hitler's intention) against competitors with vastly superior access to resources.

Politically, the pursuit of strategic autonomy was damaging in the case of Britain—Toprani notes that living standards in Britain rose considerably once the cumbersome and expensive empire was abandoned after WWII (260-261)—and, in the case of Nazi Germany, the cause for global devastation and genocide. Toprani notes that individual consumers are best served by an inter-connected energy system, one where nations are bound together through networks of production, refining, transportation, and marketing. Such a system "was unacceptable to elites in either country" (18), as it forced each oil-poor nation to depend upon an oil order dominated by the United States, which accounted for more than fifty-percent of global production before 1941. Political elites, rather than consumers, were the key driving force behind the search for 'energy independence,' an elusive term which Toprani applies to the contemporary geopolitical situation, one in which China has emerged as both the world's largest oil importer and a new rival to the United States, even as the U.S. experiences a boom in domestic oil production.

A dense book that nevertheless displays an unyielding focus on its central themes, *Oil & the Great Powers* relies heavily on statistics to illustrate its points. This works very well in certain instances—Toprani clearly indicates the deficits nagging Nazi Germany in the late 1930s—but can at times be rather overwhelming. With a few notable exceptions, the book focuses on organizations, companies, and committees rather than individuals. While this allows Toprani to move quickly through his narrative, it leaves the reader somewhat un-grounded, bereft of specific interlocutors.

Toprani manages to isolate moments of consensus amidst the scramble in both the British and German governments over how best to resolve the energy independence dilemma. His strongest point in Part I concerns the degree of complacency, and even myopia, affecting British oil policy—an argument which helps to ground his claim that Britain's aspirations towards Great Power status "were hollow without oil." (259) His strongest contribution in Part II is his work on the German-Romanian relationship, emphasizing how Romanian supply formed a critical component of the German energy balance. Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring sent "groveling" messages (246) to premier Ion Antonescu, pleading with the latter for a larger share of Romania's oil supply.

The analysis explores an under-studied aspect of Third Reich diplomacy, while illustrating once again the myriad difficulties facing any Great Power attempting to exercise strategic autonomy without an independent oil supply. As Toprani notes, "generations of armchair strategists [have] overlooked the fact that extracting, transporting, and refining...oil required massive expenditures of resources, not to mention peace and security" (234). These considerations loomed large for both Britain and Germany, and emphasize the value of Toprani's timely contribution.

REVIEW BY ALFRED C. MIERZEJEWSKI, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

Traditional international history written using a realist model has become quite rare. It is based on the assumption that sovereign states attempt to maximize their power in a competitive environment using rational, goal-oriented means. Its practitioners assume that international relations are amoral.³ Anand Toprani takes this approach in his discussion of British and German oil policy during the first half of the twentieth century. He uses a wide range of primary and secondary sources to buttress his interpretation. Overall, his conclusions are plausible, in some cases striking. However, since Nazi Germany was not a 'normal' state, his analysis of German policy is misleading. His thesis that energy independence does not necessarily lead to energy security is unconvincing (16-18).

The author's discussion of the intersection of British foreign and energy policy rests on the reading of an extensive selection of documents found at the Imperial War Museum and the National Archives in London as well as the British Petroleum Archive at the University of Warwick. He also consulted the key secondary literature on British national security policy between 1914 and 1945. Together, these sources provide a solid foundation for his analysis of how the British government attempted to shape an energy policy that would promote its pretensions of being a great power.

Toprani contends that Britain lacked the oil resources necessary to support its great power claims after World War I and that the policy that the government in London developed to offset that weakness failed (30). Britain had no significant domestic sources of crude oil. Unlike the Nazi regime, the British government concluded that developing a synthetic fuel industry would be too expensive (114-116). Nevertheless, it did not want to rely on the United States for oil as it had during World War I, fearing that American supplies would be inadequate due to rising U.S. domestic consumption and the depletion of its crude oil reserves. Whitehall also wanted to maintain its diplomatic and strategic freedom of action, hoping to return to the situation that had prevailed before World War I when it was able to follow an independent foreign policy. At the emotional level, there was the feeling that no self-respecting great power would rely on another for a resource that was essential to its national security (45, 59). Therefore, it attempted to acquire oil supplies in the Middle East. By 1930, however, the British leadership was forced to admit that it had no choice but to rely on the United States for petroleum (84, 262). Nevertheless, it continued to pursue its effort to secure supplies from the Middle East. In 1935, Italy's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact and its invasion of Abyssinia shortly after Germany renounced the disarmament provisions of the Treaty of Versailles checkmated that policy. Britain's long and expensive sea lines of communication from the Middle East through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean had become untenable (97). Toprani concludes that Britain's reliance on American and Caribbean sources of oil, necessary though it was, accelerated its long-term decline as an independent international actor (118).

The author's overall interpretation of Britain's oil policy between the two world wars is reasonable and plausible. However, there are a few points that could be refined. Toprani does not adequately explain why Britain did not want to rely on the United States for oil. It is understandable that the power that had dominated the world for two centuries was reluctant to relinquish its preeminent position. However, despite the tensions that separated the two powers during the nineteenth century, the Foreign Office and especially the Treasury recognized that the United States shared Britain's political culture and its economic values. Surely Britain could have influenced U.S. policy as a result. Winston Churchill could not have been the first to realize that when he became prime minister. The Washington Naval Treaty of 1922, which the author mentions only briefly (67), raises a related question. If Britain accepted naval parity with the United States, why did it not accept the need to cooperate with the United States on oil issues? Were the British so concerned about prestige that they pursued an oil policy that was both expensive and unlikely to succeed? Nor does the author make clear why Britain continued to cultivate its Middle Eastern suppliers even after it recognized that it could not do without American deliveries.

³ For a classic expression of this view see Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth W. Thompson, rev., *Politics among Nations. The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 6th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1985).

One further point deserves mention. The author contends that free trade contributed to overall British decline. He bases his argument of the geostrategic reasoning of Halford Mackinder and the Marxist analysis of Patrick O'Brien (256).⁴ In fact, Britain had abandoned free trade during the late nineteenth century. Moreover, free trade and the resulting international division of labor had contributed greatly to British economic growth and political strength after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Toprani is on much safer ground when he points out that changes in technology, especially the adoption of oil-fired propulsion systems by the Royal Navy, contributed to Britain's loss of international influence (28-36). More broadly, other factors, such as the country's failure to develop competitive industries during the second industrial revolution and its poor labor relations played an even greater role.⁵

For his discussion of German oil policy, Toprani visited the Federal Archives (Bundesarchiv) Berlin-Lichterfelde, the Political Archive of the Foreign Office (*Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes*), also in Berlin, the archive of the Deutsche Bank in Frankfurt/Main and the Federal Institute for Earth Sciences and Raw Materials (*Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe*) in Hannover. In Lichterfelde, he looked at the files of the Reich Ministry of Economics (*Reichswirtschaftsministerium*), the Reich Chancellery (*Reichskanzlei*) for the Hitler cabinets, the Four Year Plan (*Vierjahresplan*), the Reich Finance Ministry (*Reichsfinanzministerium*), the Reich Office for Reconstruction (*Reichsamt für Wiederaufbau*) and the Continental Oil Company (*Kontinental Öl AG*). He also used microfilm records of the Armed Forces High Command (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*) and the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*), among others provided by the United States National Archives and Records Administration. In addition, he made extensive, though incomplete use of relevant secondary sources.

Toprani argues that Nazi Germany pursued a sequential strategy in order to acquire the natural resources necessary for it to move to each succeeding step in its bid to compete effectively with world powers such as Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States. In his view, the ultimate objective of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich's was control of Europe (263). It developed a synthetic fuel industry as a bridge to enable it to seize petroleum-producing regions in southeastern Europe (21, 169). Along with the conquest of adjacent areas to the north containing other natural resources, Germany would thereby put itself in a position to acquire even more territory.

A second thesis proposed by Toprani is that only Adolf Hitler mattered. That is to say, only the Führer set priorities for Nazi Germany (234, 239). The author goes on to contend that Nazi oil strategy was successful. As evidence to support his claim, he points out that German military operations were not hampered by shortages of oil products until April 1944 (266). More broadly, he argues that Nazi Germany lost its best chance to win the war and to impose peace on its own terms with the failure of Operation Barbarossa (22, 231, 252). Related to this contention, he also maintains that Nazi Germany lacked the oil necessary to satisfy the needs of the territories that it had conquered in the lightning campaign in the spring of 1940. Therefore, its strategic position was worse than it had been before. Recognizing this problem, Hitler then decided to attack the Soviet Union before defeating Britain and earlier than he had previously intended (21, 199, 207, 231, 251, 267).

Toprani's interpretation is striking and in many respects correct. Yet it suffers from an inadequate understanding of Nazi decision-making. The realist approach causes the author to undervalue the decisive factor in Hitler's thinking: racism, in

⁴ Halford Mackinder, "Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal* 23:4 (1904): 421-427; Patrick O'Brien, "Imperialism and the Rise and Decline of the British Economy, 1688-1989," *New Left Review* 238:1 (1999): 76-78.

⁵ Britain's relative, secular economic decline has been the subject of a great deal of discussion among economic historians. See Charles Bean and Nicholas Crafts, "British economic growth since 1945: relative economic decline ... and renaissance," 131-172 in Nicholas Crafts and Gianni Toniolo, eds., *Economic Growth in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Nicholas Crafts, "Economic growth in the long twentieth century," 26-59 in Roderick Floud, Jane Humphries, and Paul Johnson, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of Britain. Volume II. 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Crafts, "Forging Ahead and Falling Behind. The Rise and Relative Decline of the First Industrial Nation," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12 (Spring 1998): 193-210 and the sources cited in these publications.

particular anti-Semitism. He does make some general qualifications to his argument to account for this factor, but they are inadequate (231, 274). Hitler had seen the Jews as a mortal threat to the German people since September 1919.⁶ Since the early 1920's, he had singled out the Soviet Union as the best source of living space available to Germany.⁷ He valued the east because it contained large areas where German peasants, called military farmers (Wehrbauern), could be settled. They would breed the young men who would fill the German armies that would destroy the Jewish/Bolshevik world conspiracy headquartered in Moscow that Hitler and his followers thought was bent on destroying the Germans, the last pure Aryan people. The author alludes to the Nazi war on the Jews, but does not integrate it into his analysis (6, 16, 21, 178, 231, 236, 252). In one incredible passage, he characterizes the racial component of the plan to attack the USSR as "pandering" to the ideological priorities of the Nazi regime's leadership, implying that those ideas were unimportant (251). More effective is the simple but powerful interpretive model suggested by Gerhard Weinberg: race and space.⁸ Hitler was motivated primarily by his desire to rid the world of the Jews. The first step in accomplishing that task was to smash the Soviet Union. Doing so would simultaneously gain Germany the space necessary to enlarge its population and to increase its store of natural resources. Hitler visualized a series of wars stretching far into the future that would solve the Jewish problem once and for all. This chiliastic vision included wars that his successors would fight to defeat the Jewish-controlled regimes in London and Washington. Hitler accelerated the pursuit of his goals due to his fears about his own mortality. Neither the Führer's apocalyptic fantasy nor his haste revolved around oil.

The realization that Hitler made all of the key decisions means that the realist model is not an appropriate tool for assessing Nazi Germany's oil policy. Since racism is an extreme form of irrationality, and Hitler determined Germany's policies, Nazi policy was irrational. Consequently, the author's extended examination of internal studies of Germany's oil position is unnecessary, and indeed, misleading. Hitler paid no attention to them. The decision to attack the Soviet Union was made without reference to them. For the same reason, from the perspective of the Nazi leadership, there was no energy crisis in the summer of 1940 (21); instead, a mad dash among competing Nazi and German governmental organizations to seize resources in western Europe took place. The Germans simply plundered the conquered territories. No consideration was given to the standard of living of the people who lived there. No plans existed for the integration of the industries located there into the German war economy. They would come years later under Albert Speer, the Reich Minister of Armaments and War Production. Even more striking, as the author correctly points out, the German armed forces did not lack petroleum products until the spring of 1944. All of the prognostications discussed by the author were both wrong and had no influence on Hitler.

In the East, the confusion was even greater. As Peter Hüttenberger pointed out four decades ago, the polycratic nature of the Nazi regime precluded rational planning and organization.⁹ The oil commandos and many other similar groups seeking to plunder the Soviet Union accomplished very little. The author acknowledges that the Germans derived only limited economic benefits from the Soviet areas that they occupied (251), though not that their failure was due mainly to the chaotic nature of Nazi "planning."¹⁰ Moreover, contrary to what the author asserts, Barbarossa was not specifically intended

⁶ See Thomas Weber, *Becoming Hitler. The Making of a Nazi* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

⁷ Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View. A Blueprint for Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 32-35; Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trsl. Ralph Mannheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 654-664; Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East. 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁸ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-36* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2-7.

⁹ Peter Hüttenberger, „Nationalsozialistische Polykratie,“ *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (1976): 417-442.

¹⁰ See also Alfred C. Mierzejewski, *The Most Valuable Asset of the Reich. A History of the German National Railway, volume 2, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 134-135.

to conquer Soviet oil producing areas (235).¹¹ In contrast, the much smaller operation of the summer of 1942, Case Blue, was intended to seize the Caucasian oil fields precisely because Hitler realized that the prospect of a quick victory had vanished.¹²

There is an alternative application of the realist model that is worth considering. From this perspective, Hitler's goals are taken as given. Since Hitler's primary objective was the destruction of the Jews, he intended to attack the Soviet Union first. Since the Poles would not allow him to cross their territory to do so, he was forced to conquer them first. The fact that they were in his opinion inferior Slavs, made it easier for him to decide to do so. A consequence of that choice was war with the West. As quickly as possible, Hitler moved against Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and France so as to clear his rear for the climactic confrontation with the Soviet Union. It is worth noting that Nazi Germany's plan for the attack on the West foresaw Germany occupying only northern France. It did not aim to defeat France and occupy all of its territory.¹³

Single factor analysis is always a risky business. That risk can be reduced by explicitly comparing the selected factor's importance to that of other relevant factors. Most observers fail to take that necessary precaution. For example, the leadership of the U.S. Army Air Forces thought that it could win the war by subtracting a single, critical industry from the German war economy, ball bearings.¹⁴ The British Marxist historian, Tim Mason, later contended that the factor that limited German war production was labor.¹⁵ More useful is Adam Tooze's broad-based insight that Germany was a poor country compared to its potential adversaries.¹⁶ A macro-level assessment of the German war economy would place primary emphasis on demographic factors, though it would also take coal, steel, food, and transportation, as well as oil production, into account. When focusing on a single factor, it is also necessary bear in mind the scope for efficiencies, using substitutes and rationing that are always available, especially to a dictatorship.

Finally, the view that the Battle of Stalingrad was the turning point on the Eastern Front is crumbling in the face of overwhelming evidence and a more dispassionate perspective.¹⁷ Toprani contributes to this overdue adjustment by arguing convincingly that the failure of Operation Barbarossa meant that Germany was not going to win World War II on its own

¹¹ See Directive No. 21 of 18 December 1940 in Walter Hubatsch, Hrsg., *Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegführung 1939-1945* (Frankfurt/Main: Bernard & Graefe, 1962), 84-88.

¹² Hubatsch, *Weisungen*, 183-188 especially 184.

¹³ For discussions of these initial campaigns see Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms. A Global History of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 48-138; Klaus A. Maier, Horst Rohde, Bernd Stegemann, Hans Umbreit, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 2. Die Errichtung der Hegemonie auf dem Europäischen Kontinent* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979).

¹⁴ Haywood S. Hansell, *The Air Plan that Defeated Hitler* (New York: Arno, 1980), 158-60. For a critique of this approach see Hugh Rockoff, *America's Economic Way of War. War and the US Economy from the Spanish-American War to the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 201-202.

¹⁵ Tim Mason, "Innere Krise und Angriffskrieg 1938/39," 158-188 in Friedrich Forstmeier, Hans-Erich Volkmann, Hrsg., *Wirtschaft und Rüstung am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1975) and *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft. Dokumente und Materialien zur deutschen Arbeiterpolitik, 1936-1939* (Düsseldorf: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975).

¹⁶ Adam Tooze, *Wages of Destruction. The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking, 2006), 136-37. See also Alfred C. Mierzejewski, *Collapse of the German War Economy. Allied Air Power and the German National Railway, 1944-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 65-67.

¹⁷ For a recent example see Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle. A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 448, 456-57, 484.

terms (252).¹⁸ It also meant, as he points out, that Germany would not be included among the first rank of world powers after the war. It did not, however, mean that the Germans “forfeited” their national existence (18). After the German surrender, the Allies governed Germany for only a few years and intended to restore its sovereignty. The issue was how Germany would fit into the new post-war political order. In the event, the country was split. Even then, neither the Federal Republic of Germany nor the German Democratic Republic simply executed orders from their respective hegemon. Since 1990, the united Germany has played a prominent independent role in European Union and world affairs.

In conclusion, Anand Toprani’s new book provides a useful addition to the literature. His explanation of the failure of British oil policy is sound, as far as it goes. His assessment of Nazi Germany’s successful oil policy is correct, but too limited in scope and, compared to the literature emanating from the German studies field, anachronistic. He ignores the most important factor in Hitler’s mind: race. That is all the more striking because he correctly identifies Hitler as the only Nazi decision maker who mattered. This point can be taken further. Nazi Germany was not a ‘normal’ state. It was driven by an irrational racist ideology. Therefore, it differed from both the western democracies and the eastern dictatorships of the twentieth century. Scholars should thus treat it accordingly.

The independence/security critique suffers from a loose definition of terms and their inconsistent application. The discussion of price dynamics and government intervention in the oil industry is weakened by misconceptions that obscure the matter rather than clarify it. Clearly, for the United States and the Soviet Union, both of which had domestic sources sufficient to satisfy their needs, independence and security were fully compatible. The dilemma of choosing between one or the other arose only for those powers that did not have domestic sources adequate to support their political ambitions. For them, political and economic factors had divergent implications. The solution was to choose one or the other. Britain did. Nazi Germany did not. The difference in results was stark.

Reading Toprani’s thought-provoking book also suggests some historiographical considerations. It shows the limits of the realist model as an interpretive framework. That model fails when used to explain the behavior of a highly irrational actor. We should also be careful when engaging in single-factor analysis. More broadly, it implies that human emotion plays a role in the decision-making taking place in Beijing, Brussels, Moscow, and London, to say nothing of Washington, D.C. The manifest unreliability of the numerous projections of oil supplies and consumption produced by German planners should serve as a reminder that economic forecasting, even with today’s improved methodology, more extensive sources of information, and vastly greater computing power, should be viewed with the utmost caution.

¹⁸ Timing here is important. Barbarossa was lost by mid-August 1941 and the German field commanders as well as Hitler knew it. See David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany’s Defeat in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) for the best account to this development. It is noteworthy that Volker Ulrich comes to the same conclusion using different sources in the second volume of his biography of Hitler. See Volker Ulrich, *Adolf Hitler. Biographie. Die Jahre des Untergangs* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2018), 217, 233-34.

This book essentially relates a story of failure and geopolitical decline, of Great Britain, Germany and, by inference, Europe more generally. The First World War demonstrated conclusively that modern warfare depended heavily upon the consumption of petroleum products. If, in 1914-1918, the Allies had “floated to victory on a wave of oil,”¹⁹ then it was clearly paramount, in any future military undertaking, for potential combatants to ensure adequate and reliable supplies. For Britain and Germany, this posed a particular problem. Both had massive stocks of coal, which had powered their respective industrialization, and the British Navy had developed a world-wide network of bunkers and coaling stations to keep it afloat. Yet neither could draw upon any substantial domestic oil supply, not even, in the case of Britain, in the massive and far-flung British Empire. Following the heavy reliance on U.S. oil in particular during the 1914-1918 war, both Britain and Germany determined upon the pursuit of a policy of petroleum independence.

In the event, the British still found themselves dependent upon American imports in the Second World War, whilst Nazi Germany was sorely hampered by energy shortages. Britain’s pursuit of Middle Eastern oil contributed to imperial over-stretch, through which the British Empire found itself at its largest extent even as the financial and economic power of the metropole was in comparative decline. Meanwhile, the move into the Soviet Union, the opening up of a second front, and the need to provide for occupied Western Europe prompted over-extension on the German part. Fear of oil shortages was one factor motivating the launch by Germany of Operation Barbarossa, in a desperate move to secure control over the oil of the Caucasus, and eliminate any Soviet threat to Romanian production. The failure of the invasion in essence cost Germany the war. Anand Toprani examines in detail the policy evolution during the interwar period and the extent to which this induced strategic over-extension. He also considers the contribution of this to the long-term decline of both Germany and Britain. The book is amply illustrated with maps, tables, and figures, many of them taken from contemporary sources in the United States. It is well researched and referenced, based on extensive archival work and demonstrating a wide knowledge of both oil politics and the wider historical context. It throws light on some aspects of oil diplomacy that are rarely discussed in any detail, and reaches conclusions with which I am in general agreement.

As someone who spent most of her career in a department committed to the concept of comparative history, I am intrinsically sympathetic to Toprani’s contention that through comparison it is possible to shed additional light on analogous case studies. The choice of Britain and Germany is inspired: much of the literature on the history of inter-war oil diplomacy focuses on the Anglo-American dimension, which is indeed important, but which follows the policies of two countries whose position with respect to oil resources was radically different, except insofar as both were parent governments to some of the most powerful oil companies in the world. In the conclusion, Toprani points out that Japan also shared a number of characteristics with Britain and Germany, including strategic over-extension in pursuit of oil, a comparison that the author was presumably prevented from pursuing because of language difficulties (he uses primary sources for both Britain and Germany) but one that would be worthy of further exploration. There are both advantages and disadvantages to treating each case study as a separate section of the book, rather than pursuing a comparative analysis throughout. In this instance, where the overall trajectory is the same (a process of strategic over-stretch in pursuit of energy independence) but the policies and even time scale are different, the process adopted by Toprani, of examining parallel case studies, works best. Fundamental to those differences was the role of Britain as a maritime power, looking for answers in its extended Empire, and Germany’s position as a continental power. This is not, however, to deny the existence of some similarities. For example, both governments in effect sought to establish an “oil empire” in an extended geographical area of influence; the expanded Empire included the Middle East for Great Britain and the ‘lebensraum’ of the Third Reich was based in Continental Europe, for Germany.

¹⁹ This statement by British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon is cited by Toprani, however in the section on Germany, on p.143. It is from a speech given to the members of the Inter-Allied Petroleum Conference on 21 November 1918. See *The Times*, 22 November 1919.

Perhaps hardly surprisingly for an author who has worked in government, there is a considerable emphasis on the wheels of bureaucracy, the plethora of departments and agencies involved in developing policy (often a good illustration of too many cooks spoiling the broth) and the debates and views of bureaucrats and politicians. This has positive elements. It is good, for example, to see attention paid to the Oil Board of the British Committee of Imperial Defence, which devoted a lot of time to calculating how British petroleum needs, both civilian and military, might be met in time of war (even though, as is often the case with bureaucracy, the deliberations were frequently slow and did not always move to reflect the changing conditions on the ground). In time it identified the main threats that faced Britain's oil supply in time of war: the security of the Mediterranean; whether the United States was likely to be a 'friendly' neutral; and the resultant difficulties if Britain were called upon to wage war in both Europe and the Pacific. Where Germany is concerned, Toprani carefully explores the conflict between the military and civilian wings of the Third Reich. Nonetheless, at points the focus on committees, departments and agencies, and rivalries between officials appears to be at the cost of a wider perspective upon the broader context within which such policy-making occurred. Significant factors such as British power in the Middle East after 1918, the troubled state of Anglo-American relations through much of the interwar period, and the history of the rise of the National Socialists in Germany and the nature and extent of their aggressive expansionism, are mentioned, but rarely developed in any detail.

In his discussion of Britain, Toprani covers ground which is, for the most part, familiar to many readers: the desire of the British to create an 'all-British' oil company drawing upon the resources of Anglo-Persian and in particular Shell; their wish to reserve for themselves the projected oil riches of the Middle East, where the British had established a strong political hold; and their determination to resist attempts by American oil companies to participate in the Middle Eastern concessions. But he examines these aspects of policy across a longer time frame, and with a clear sustained narrative of aspirations to energy independence, despite the ultimate failure to achieve it. The book takes the story of British oil policy into the 1930s, a period often overlooked by historians of government policy, who focus on the complex manoeuvrings over the Mesopotamian oil concession and the abortive attempts to gain control over Royal Dutch Shell, and who presume that since oil was plentiful and cheap in the 1930s, it was no longer of such concern to Whitehall.²⁰ It is also a significant decade in that Great Britain had to face a sustained challenge from the rise of oil nationalism, a phenomenon more usually associated with the 1950s onward, but one which was clearly apparent in Mexico and the Soviet Union, and to a lesser extent in Iran, even before the Second World War.

However, whilst the Persian crisis of 1932-1933 demonstrated Britain's somewhat tenuous hold on Middle Eastern oil, it did not prompt any reconsideration of British planned reliance upon the oil of that region in any future war, despite the growing threat in the Mediterranean from an aggressive fascist Italy and patterns of peacetime supply which relied heavily on the Western Hemisphere, particularly Venezuela. Toprani outlines the failures of the British to plan sufficiently for all potential scenarios. In the event, the closure of the Mediterranean meant that during World War Two the British still had to rely heavily upon U.S. and Venezuelan oil, despite the ruinous costs in terms of foreign currency exchange and transportation. Beyond the specific history of oil, more might have been said about the shock within British government circles at finding their position vis-à-vis the United States so much weakened as a result of the First World War. Historical opinion differs as to the extent to which the British retained their supremacy in the face of American isolationism, with Brian McKercher in particular stressing Britain's continued strength, certainly into the 1930s.²¹

²⁰ See, for example, Michael J. Hogan, *Informal Entente: The Private Structure of Cooperation in Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy, 1918-1928* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1977); Gareth G. Jones, *The State and the Emergence of the British Oil Industry* (London: Macmillan, 1981); and Marion Kent, *Oil and Empire: British Policy and Mesopotamian Oil, 1900-1920* (London: Macmillan 1976). One exception is Brian S. McBeth, *British Oil Policy 1919-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1985).

²¹ Brian McKercher, ed., *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920's: The Struggle for Supremacy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); and McKercher, *Transition of Power: Britain's Loss of Global Pre-eminence to the United States, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). I note that McKercher's books are not listed in Toprani's otherwise admirable bibliography. His work would have enriched the discussion of the 'declinist' school of British historiography.

In the case of Germany, Toprani illustrates effectively that concerns about energy independence were not the sole prerogative of the Third Reich: even before Adolf Hitler's coming to power, the Weimar Republic demonstrated considerable interest in the science of synthetic oil, spearheaded by IG Farben, and encouraged by both the military and civil servants keen to reduce the economic costs of imported fuel and encourage job creation. As with Britain, Toprani looks in some detail at the different power groups involved in the evolution of German oil policy, but more might have been said about the complexities of German politics, the role of the military, the rise of the Far Right, and the identity of those supporting an emphasis upon synthetic fuel. Much attention is given to the Four Year Plan of 1936, which stressed the importance of self-sufficiency. By the spring of 1939 Germany had succeeded in considerably improving its petroleum position, with increased domestic production due to the acquisition of Austria, a growth in synthetic manufacture, and increased imports from Romania.

In the event, Germany's more aggressive policy thereafter, leading to the outbreak of war by September 1939, proved premature: at first the gamble seemed to pay off, but the occupation of continental Europe, coupled with the failure to defeat Britain and remove its blockade, meant that ironically, "Germany's greatest triumph planted the seeds for a crippling energy crisis – a fact that is absent from most historical narratives." (99) This could only be solved by acquiring the oil of the Soviet Union or the Middle East – or even, ideally, both. This helped shape German war strategy, with dire consequences. Toprani points to the significance of the establishment of the Continental Oil Company in 1941, as a public-private firm intended to operate oilfields across Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East in place of their previous owners. This did not materialise, and whilst German oil policy could support a limited war of short duration, it could not sustain a continental empire after June 1940.

Although the title of the book suggests that the discussion covers the period until 1945, in effect coverage ends in 1942, in both case studies. The reason for this needs to be explained, and indeed it means the omission of certain key elements: in the case of Germany, the impact of the targeted bombing campaign directed against the synthetic fuel plants, and in the case of Britain the attempts in the later part of the war to plan for the post-war world, notably through the pursuit of an Anglo-American Oil Agreement, and the efforts by the British to use war time necessity to bolster their oil position in the Middle East. The new concessions in that region necessitated substantial infrastructure, for example in the form of refineries and pipelines, which in turn required supplies of scarce construction materials. Harold Ickes, the petroleum administrator for war in Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration was reluctant to release supplies of such materials for fear that this would enhance British competitiveness after the War.²²

Toprani entitles his concluding chapter "Oil and the End of European Primacy, 1914-1945" and this is the main lesson that he draws from these two case studies. The passing of global primacy from the countries of Europe to the United States and the Soviet Union mirrored the transfer from an age of coal, in plentiful supply in Europe, to oil, with which the U.S. and the USSR were richly endowed. Because of its historical significance, Toprani suggests, the history of oil plays a powerful part in explaining the geopolitical decline in European primacy, even though access to resources shaped the outcome of the Second World War in ways that political and military historians often neglect. Once Japan and Germany failed to secure the early victory on which both had gambled, the massive Allied superiority in terms of resources prevailed. That superiority was particularly marked in the case of petroleum. As the author notes, "resource availability is never a sufficient explanation for complex geopolitical outcomes, but it is a necessary one." (274) Toprani has ably demonstrated the truth of that assessment in this detailed and thorough study of British and German oil policy in the critical period around the two world wars. His book provides an excellent addition to the literature on the history of oil.

²² Fiona Venn, "'The Wartime 'Special Relationship'? From Oil War to Anglo-American Oil Agreement, 1939-1945," *The Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 10 (2012): 119-133.

RESPONSE BY ANAND TOPRANI, U.S. NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

I am indebted to H-Diplo for organizing a roundtable with such a diverse group of scholars and to Christopher Dietrich for writing the introduction. The three readers—Gregory Brew, Fiona Venn, and Alfred Mierzejewski—broadly sympathize with my conclusions while still offering valuable critiques that afford me an opportunity to clarify my analytical choices and expound upon issues that I had not fully considered during the drafting of the book but are now playing a larger role in my scholarly agenda—specifically the economic, financial, and industrial foundations of national power.

My book reinterprets the role of oil in British and German strategy during the era of the two world wars. Despite their radically different geopolitical positions—one an established maritime empire, the other a nascent continental power—Britain and Germany ended World War One convinced that they must avoid relying on rivals for access to oil. The subsequent failure of their bids for energy independence denied them the ability to pursue truly autonomous great power policies. Both nations learned the hard way that there was a trade-off between energy independence (avoiding reliance on foreigners) and energy security (acquiring sufficient supplies at stable prices). In an era of renewed “great power competition,” this insight has obvious relevance, particularly within the context of the burgeoning Sino-American rivalry.

Brew draws particular attention to my emphasis on the financial and logistical dimensions of the great power struggle for oil. He recognizes a point that too many casual observers of the oil industry miss—that exploiting oil reserves depends upon more than just mere physical possession. There must be a seamless connection between upstream (exploration and production) and downstream (transportation, refining, and retailing) operations. Difficulties with petroleum supplies arose then not from any overall shortage of oil—during the interwar period, global production rose from 550 million barrels per day in 1919 to almost 2 billion in 1939.²³

Simple abundance did not mean that all countries had free access—there was still the matter of paying for and moving oil imports. In peacetime, the greater constraint was financial. Between the world wars, most of the non-Communist world’s oil was controlled by the Anglo-American major oil companies, which demanded payment in hard currency. For Weimar Germany, importing oil depended upon generating either an export surplus (which entailed cuts in domestic consumption) or American loans to subsidize budget and trade deficits.²⁴ The advent of the Third Reich in 1933 complicated matters, since rearmament (especially after 1935/6) created a new burden by depriving Germany of export earnings. The resulting shortage of hard currency ruled out the accumulation of large domestic stockpiles to supplement local production.

Even Britain was not immune from foreign-exchange difficulties. Although British firms were entrenched in many of the world’s most-promising oil territories, their operations still entailed significant dollar or gold expenditures for expenses such as royalty payments, salaries, material imports (e.g. high-quality steel for refineries and pipelines), and royalty payments. None of this was unbearable in peacetime, but in wartime, it accelerated the exhaustion of Britain’s foreign exchange reserves, which were hard pressed to cover other vital imports.

The British hoped to resolve their resource handicap through recourse to Middle Eastern oil. This saved foreign exchange but imposed immense logistical costs if the Mediterranean were closed to British shipping. Transportation from the Western Hemisphere was less prohibitive in tonnage but horrendous for British finances because of the foreign-exchange costs. The British chose the latter option in 1940, fully aware that they were hastening the date at which they would become dependent on U.S. material and financial assistance to continue prosecuting the war. The changing fortunes of war—

²³ DeGolyer and MacNaughton, *Twentieth Century Petroleum Statistics: Historical Data* (Dallas: DeGolyer and MacNaughton, 2004), 4.

²⁴ Stephen Schuker, *American “Reparations” to Germany, 1919-1933: Implications for the Third-World Debt Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1988), 19-46, 82-97, 115ff.

simply the military balance but also the exorbitant resource costs—forced them to jettison their prewar aims and strategies and finally accept the reality of dependence (119ff).

Brew wishes I could have explored in greater detail the equivalent process of reassessment in Germany following Operation Barbarossa. (250-252) I refrained from doing so because I have already considered the issue elsewhere, but responding to Brew's point here will also address a criticism levied by Venn about the relative lack of detail on events between 1942 and 1945.²⁵

In May 1945, General Alfred Jodl, the Chief of Operations for the German Armed Forces High Command, made a startling confession: in December 1941, with the failure of Operation Barbarossa, German dictator Adolf Hitler recognized that Germany had passed its “culminating point,” and that “victory could no longer be achieved.”²⁶ German strategic aims for the remainder of World War Two were “limited”: an agreement with the Western Allies that allowed Germany to retain some or all of its gains and concentrate forces in the East. The strategy the Germans adopted was, in today's parlance, one of “cost imposition.” Specifically, they intended to build a defensive bulwark in Europe whose destruction would entail intolerable losses for the Anglo-Americans. This was the background for Germany's Eastern offensive in 1942, “Case Blue,” to deprive the Soviet Union of its major sources of oil in the Caucasus, annihilate large portions of the Red Army, and secure enough oil for the German war economy to sustain a protracted air/sea struggle against Anglo-American forces. It was a far cry from the grandiose geopolitical fantasies with which Hitler began the war.

Hitler's idiosyncratic views are essential to understanding why Germany chose between competing strategies at key junctures, such as whether to pursue the war against Britain following the fall of France through a “peripheral” strategy in the Mediterranean or to launch Operation Barbarossa (233ff). Brew regrets that for the most part, my analysis lacks sustained attention to individual decision-makers. There are, I would suggest, plenty of personalities in the book, but they are to be found among the bureaucracies responsible for strategy development and implementation. Appreciating the differences in outlook and assumptions among different firms and bureaucracies may be more fruitful than focusing on individual officials, whose views rarely contradicted the institutions they represented.

Venn concurs with my decision to devote attention to the operations of organizations such as the Oil Board of the Committee of Imperial Defense but wishes I did more to situate Britain's oil policy within its overall post-World War One grand strategy. I wish that I could have done so, but the scale of the challenge is daunting, and there is a dearth of studies that capture the full complexity of British strategy after 1918. Among the better efforts are Robert Boyce's *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization*, which illuminates the interaction between economic and security affairs, while John Darwin's *The Empire Project* is strong on imperial policy. The former unfortunately ends in 1934 and focuses on diplomacy and finance, while it is hard to reconcile some the latter's claims—for example, that the Middle Eastern oil reduced British dependence on the United States, or that Britain could write off the Mediterranean in the late-1930s—with my findings.²⁷

Venn's comment hints at a staggering incongruity at the heart of British strategy after 1918. Whereas one aspect of Britain's postwar grand strategy was seeking energy independence from the United States, another was preserving U.S. goodwill to preserve Britain's expanded imperium. Moreover, Britain pursued these aims in a contradictory fashion. Specifically, it

²⁵ Anand Toprani, “The First War for Oil: The Caucasus, German Strategy, and the Turning Point of the War on the Eastern Front, 1942,” *Journal of Military History* 80:3 (July 2016): 815-854.

²⁶ Helmuth Greinert and Percy Ernst Schramm, eds., *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht, Band IV* (Frankfurt: Bernard & Graefe, 1961), 1503.

²⁷ Robert Boyce, *The Great Interwar Crisis and the Collapse of Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), *passim* (esp. 24-32, 85-91, 143-153, 425ff); John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 305ff (esp. 470, 429-430).

sought energy independence in the 1920s when its hopes for cooperation with the United States were at their highest. Conversely, British planners acknowledged their dependence on American oil in the 1930s even as Anglo-American relations deteriorated due to factors such as Britain's decision to abandon the Gold Standard in September 1931 and its policy of Imperial Preference after 1932.

How are we to reconcile these divergent impulses? While British officials recognized their economic and military weaknesses, they were incapable of using this knowledge to craft a coherent foreign policy. This appears the only explanation for their baffling decision to offend Italy by supporting ineffectual League of Nations sanctions for its invasion of Abyssinia in 1935/6 without considering the consequences for British wartime oil supplies, which depended upon imports from the Middle East traversing the Mediterranean (97ff).

Venn also raises questions about the periodization of the book, noting that its treatment of events between 1942 and 1945 is rather light. If I were writing a history of oil policy in both nations until 1945, I could not avoid examining the two examples Venn mentions: the Anglo-American Oil Agreement of 1944/5 and the sustained bombing of German synthetic fuel plants in 1944. I instead chose the eras of the two world wars because I intended to reconsider the course of Europe's 'Second Thirty Years War' using oil as an interpretive framework. This period saw the world's final spasms of great-power wars, and its most-significant geopolitical result was Europe's eclipse by United States.²⁸

The review of Mierzejewski is the most critical but also has numerous factual errors and misconceptions. I will refrain from correcting all of the errors—although I would note that labelling Patrick O'Brien a "Marxist" betrays a profound unfamiliarity with his work—and respond only to Mierzejewski's primary objections.

Mierzejewski makes the puzzling accusation that my book relies on a flawed "realist" model that assumes great powers pursue their national interests on a "rational" (i.e. benefit-maximizing) basis. Mierzejewski himself rebuts this argument in his third paragraph, when he notes my point that great powers have traditionally avoided relying on potential rivals for vital resources, even if dependence was costlier than foreign trade. How then can I be a realist when my own analysis demonstrates that states do not behave "rationally"?

Mierzejewski also criticizes my "inadequate understanding of Nazi decision-making," stating that I have downplayed the "decisive factor in Hitler's thinking: racism, in particular anti-Semitism."²⁹ Accordingly, he contends that the quest for energy independence had no meaningful impact on German policy aims or even military strategy. In making his case, Mierzejewski misunderstands analysis of German oil supplies during World War Two, claiming that my book "points out that German military operations were not hampered by shortages of oil products until April 1944." In reality, I show that German supplies were only adequate until the spring of 1944 because the worsening military situation reduced consumption (250, 266).³⁰ Similarly, he accuses me of reducing Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union to a war for oil, when I contended that oil—specifically the looming energy shortage in Western Europe—influenced only the timing and the scope of Operation Barbarossa. (231, 234ff, 239) My analysis bolsters the case that the German invasion had a variety of ultimate

²⁸ Ian Kershaw, "Europe's Second Thirty Years War," *History Today* 55: 9 (2005): 10-17.

²⁹ Mierzejewski also suggests that my use of the verb "to pander" (251) when examining the genesis of Operation Barbarossa means that I consider National Socialist ideology "unimportant." The *OED* defines "to pander" as "to minister to the immoral urges or distasteful desires of another, or to gratify a person with such desires."

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/136753?rskey=iHHqld&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid>.

³⁰ See also: Greinert, *Kriegstagebuch*, 942ff. I first encountered this insight in the work of Dietrich Eichholtz, an East German historian whose work was marginalized following German Unification. See: *Deutsche Ölpolitik im Zeitalter der Weltkriege* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2010).

(ideological) and proximate (strategic) causes. This is a nuanced perspective, to be sure, and it is one that Brew appreciated in his review.

In his comments, Mierzejewski confuses German *aims* with *strategy*. I have no dispute with the consensus on the former and focused instead on the latter—how the regime expected to achieve those ends. Mierzejewski quotes Gerhard Weinberg to the effect that the only “interpretative model” necessary to comprehend National Socialist decision-making is “race and space.”³¹ Even if we grant Weinberg’s point, how exactly were the National Socialists’ supposed to exploit their newfound *Lebensraum* without oil? Modern agriculture is particularly resource intensive, depending on petroleum for tractors and distribution of produce.³² German planners recognized that control of the Ukraine was useless without oil and expanded the initial boundaries of Operation Barbarossa to include the Caucasus. (239)

Mierzejewski nonetheless considers my analysis of British and German geopolitical decline as simplistic because it supposedly relies on “single factor analysis” without identifying where exactly in my book I claim that a shortage of oil is a sufficient explanation for either Europe’s geopolitical decline or Germany’s defeats in the world wars. In fact, echoing the work of Emily Meierding, I state on the book’s *first page* that competition over natural resources is never the cause of international strife so much as an outgrowth of it.³³ I did, however, provide a number of reasons why oil is worthy of historical scrutiny, including its centrality to twentieth-century warfare. (1, 5ff)

Beyond World War Two, Mierzejewski also finds my argument about the incompatibility of energy independence with energy security unconvincing because superpowers such the United States and the Soviet Union have the luxury of enjoying both. That was only true in the short run, as the Soviet example demonstrates. By the late-1950s, the Soviet Union met the criteria for being energy independent, but did this also promote energy security? So long as oil prices were high, the Soviets could use the export revenues to guarantee a modest standard of living, modernize their economy, and fund their Cold War competition. The only problem was that stabilizing prices required cooperation with other producers through bodies such as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries—in other words, by subsuming national autonomy within a multilateral framework. Production cuts were unacceptable for the Soviets, and when prices collapsed in the 1980s, the resulting economic mayhem hastened the demise of the Soviet Union.³⁴

Finally, in contradiction to Venn’s assessment, Mierzejewski judges my comparison of Britain with National Socialist Germany invalid because the latter was not a “normal” state. Comparative history challenges us, however, to build upon our knowledge of particular national experiences to illuminate “common developments within different contexts,” while still acknowledging the differences between the examples under consideration.³⁵ Britain and Germany became leaders of the Industrial Revolution thanks to their ample coal supplies, but they found themselves at a geopolitical disadvantage once the

³¹ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany. Diplomatic Revolution in Europe, 1933-36* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 2-7.

³² Sören Flachowsky, “Die schwere Artillerie der Erzeugungsschlacht’: Landwirtschaftliche Gas-Schlepper und die Mobilisierung alternativer Kraftstoffressourcen im Vierjahresplan,” in: Sören Flachowsky, *et al.*, ed., *Ressourcenmobilisierung. Wissenschaftspolitik und Forschungspraxis im NS-Herrschaftssystem* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016), 425ff.

³³ Emily Meierding, *The Oil Wars Myth: Petroleum and the Causes of International Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

³⁴ David Painter, “From Linkage to Economic Warfare: Energy, Soviet-American Relations, and the End of the Cold War,” in: *Cold War Energy: A Transnational History of Soviet Oil and Gas*, ed. Jeronim Perović (Cham: Palgrave, 2016), 283-318.

³⁵ Charles Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), ix.

transition to oil began. One might have expected that two vastly different nations would have chosen dissimilar policies and strategies to address their oil shortage, but their shared desire for energy independence, if not their specific approaches to achieving it, is striking. Consequently, when studying geopolitics, we cannot afford to neglect either the material or institutional dimensions of strategy. Access to critical resources will continue to shape the course and outcome of great-power rivalries long after the Age of Oil has ended.